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THIRTIETH

Anniversary Discourse,

DELIVERED IN

IPSWICH, JUNE 29, 1856.

BY REV. DANIEL FITZ, PASTOR OF THE SOUTH CHURCH.

BOSTON:
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South Parish, Ipswich, July 30, 1856.

Rev. Daniel Fitz:

Dear Sir,—From various sources the undersigned have heard expressions of commendation of your thirtieth anniversary sermon, preached to your people on the Sabbath June 29th, with a request that it should be published. These expressions and desires entirely correspond with our own views and feelings, and we therefore respectfully request a copy for publication.

With sentiments of deep respect and Christian love we remain affectionately yours,

EBEN CALDWELL,
CHARLES KIMBALL,
RANDALL ANDREWS,
JOSEPH P. BROWN,
JOSEPH E. BOMER,
} Parish Committee.

Ipswich, August 8, 1856.

Gentlemen:

I thank you very much for the kind manner in which you speak of my anniversary sermon. As my venerable predecessor preached a *sixtieth* anniversary discourse, which was printed, I am the more inclined to give a *thirtieth* to the press. It may serve as a memorial of the past, and it may be of some interest for the present, and for future years.

With much esteem and affection,

DANIEL FITZ.

Capt. Eben Caldwell,
Hon. Charles Kimball,
Mr. Randall Andrews,
Mr. Joseph P. Brown,
Joseph E. Bomer, M. D.,
Parish Committee.

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DISCOURSE.

ECCLESIASTES. 1: 4.

ONE GENERATION PASSETH AWAY, AND ANOTHER GENERATION COMETH.

Of all the kindred, and tribes, and nations of men now on the earth, the same remark may be made :—"they are passing away." The youngest as well as the oldest are tending toward the same point—a resting-place in the grave. There is a constant progress on the part of all toward this point. Whether they are at home or abroad, in sickness or in health, distinguished or obscure, eminently good or notoriously wicked, they are alike telling off their hasty moments, acting their part on the stage of life, and hurrying toward the close of the scene. There is a limit set, a boundary fixed in the case of every individual, which in no instance can be passed. Some two hundred generations have passed away since man was created and placed on this earth. "How populous, how vital is the grave!" Who can estimate the numbers that have from generation to generation finished their earthly course and gone to mingle with the

congregation of the dead! It is a multitude which no man can number!

Periods of special interest and unusual solemnity seem to call out our feelings afresh, invite us to review the *past*, to prize the *present*, and to look forward with hope into the future. What a general sensation was produced on the close of the last half century! How will some of the young now present be interested, who shall be spared to witness the termination of the nineteenth century! To bid farewell to so short a period as a single year awakens no little emotion in thoughtful minds, calling forth desires to amend the past, and better fulfill the responsibilities of the future.

We are called upon, my beloved hearers, *this day* in the good Providence of our God to review a period of thirty years. A generation has gone since the ordination of the pastor of this church took place. Though so long a period has passed away since that interesting and solemn occasion, the scene this day comes up anew before his mind. The impressions of that day were too tender and too sacred to fade from the memory. It was Wednesday, June 28, 1826. The sun rose pleasantly on the day appointed for the interesting services, and reviving nature smiled on the passing scene. The council was composed of the venerable pastor, two of his sons, the other three pastors of *ancient* Ipswich, and the minister, who had been the spiritual guide of the candidate during his earlier years. The parents, who had most kindly and most assiduously cared for a son while

preparing to take such responsibilities upon him, were witnesses to a scene calling forth their tender sensibilities, and awakening new gratitude toward a prayer-hearing and a covenant-keeping God!

The young pastor entered on his great and sacred work "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." There were two considerations in particular, which tended very much to afford relief and encouragement. One was the entire harmony of the people in the call they extended, and the other was the perfect cordiality and the exuberant kindness of the venerable colleague. In the sermon delivered at the ordination by Rev. Dr. Daniel Dana, there are a few sentences touching these two points, which produced a deep impression on the mind of the youthful pastor, and afforded him a support not to be forgotten. They were contained in a brief address to the pastor elect:—"You come to a people, who receive you with united affections and open arms —a people whose unfailing attachment to their minister has stood the test of sixty years. You come to an aged father in the ministry, who welcomes you with delight into the vineyard he has so long cultivated. His counsels, his solicitudes, his prayers, his affections, while life remains, will be yours."

These remarks naturally carry our thoughts back to the time-honored house in which such solemnities were witnessed. It began to be erected in 1747. It was dedicated in 1748 and public services were held in it for the first time on the Sabbath, May 22d. It was occu-

pied as a place of worship till the very last day of the year 1837, which was the Sabbath. The congregation with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow assembled in it on that day for the last time. It was no doubt the spiritual birthplace of some, who on that solemn day bade it a final farewell.

A very considerable portion of those present never saw this ancient temple, and it may be that some even are not aware of its location. For their sakes, and for the sake of reviving in others feelings, which are at once "pleasant and mournful to the soul," it may be suitable to give it a passing remark.

This house in which our fathers worshiped, and in which some of us have paid our solemn vows, stood nearly in front of this church, just beyond the street that passes so near it. It was built after the ancient manner, very plain in its construction, having no steeple and no entries. The pulpit, which is still to be seen in the basement of this church, and which is among the agreeable memorials of the past, was located on the north side of the house. There were three doors, one opposite the pulpit, one at the east end, and the other at the west end. The pews were square, with high backs. The seats were hung with hinges. They were lifted up when the congregation rose for devotional services, and they were let fall when they sat down. There were three galleries, entered at the south-east and the south-west corners of the house. The one in front of the pulpit was

occupied by the choir, behind which there was a row of pews adjoining the wall.

Though this house was so simple and plain in its construction, it was a delightful Sabbath home to many who worshiped in it. As the old men wept at the remembrance of the first temple, when the second was reared, so our aged men and women could not but drop some tears of sorrow as they passed from the ancient to the new house of worship.

Though the former sanctuary was occupied ninety years, only three pastors ministered in it. Of those who officiated as pastors in this house, it is natural for me to speak. The first was Rev. John Walley. He was a man of respectable talents and of sincere piety. The records he made manifest a spirit imbued with the gospel of Christ, and a disposition to look to God for direction and for aid amid the responsible duties of the ministry. He was the pastor of this church seventeen years. During his ministry thirty-four were admitted to the church.

The second pastor was Rev. Joseph Dana, D. D., who was ordained Nov. 7, 1765. Before he was twenty-one, he was licensed to preach the gospel, and began the great and sacred work to which he diligently and faithfully devoted a protracted life. During his ministry, one hundred and twenty-one were received as members of the church. It was the desire of Dr. Dana that he might be useful as long as he should live. The God he devotedly served granted him his desire. His mental faculties

were remarkably continued to him. He continued to read, to study, to write sermons till within a very short period before he ascended to his rest. The last Sabbath of his life he was present at three services in the sanctuary, and in the afternoon of that day he led the devotions of the people in the principal prayer. The succeeding Friday, Nov. 16, 1827, having the day previous spoken his last words of tenderness and love to his children, and given his last affectionate counsels to his colleague, he peacefully fell asleep in Jesus, having been pastor of the church sixty-two years, and having preached to the same people nearly sixty-four years.

What an amount of religious instruction did he give in that long period! How many prayers did he offer up in that venerable house of worship! Few men in any age have understood the Bible as thoroughly as he, and few preachers have been as careful to draw all their instructions, counsels and warnings directly from it. He was remarkable for weaving Scripture into all his discourses, and for substantiating all his arguments by divine authority.

Having made these references to the ministry of my predecessors, you will expect me to give some account of my own, and of the merciful dealings of divine Providence with us for the last thirty years. During this period, there have been two hundred and seventy-two admissions to the church. The greatest number received in any one year was fifty. These were admitted in 1850.

In almost every year more or less have taken the vows of God upon them.

The present number of the church is about two hundred. Only ten who were admitted before the present ministry, survive—two males and eight females. There have been three hundred baptisms; seventy-one adults, and two hundred and twenty-nine infants. Two hundred and four couples have been joined in marriage. There have been four hundred and four deaths. Some four thousand sermons have been preached by the pastor and his substitutes. About nine thousand pastoral visits have been made. Some four thousand prayer-meetings, including the monthly and Sabbath school concerts, have been attended, and two hundred communion seasons have been observed.

These statistics I propose to make the basis of somewhat extended remarks.

In the first place, I would ask your attention to the circumstances under which these two hundred and seventy-two admissions have been made to the church. Many of those who have confessed Christ before men, have directed their attention to their spiritual interests when there was no special excitement among the people on the subject of religion. Perhaps on some favored Sabbath, or in some season of bereavement, eternal realities have been solemnly presented to their minds, and the truth has been brought home to their consciences and their hearts with unwonted power. They have been led deeply to feel that, though others around

them seemed to be devoting their best affections and their earnest efforts to this world, and of course to be slumbering over their spiritual concerns, it was high time for them to arouse and seek the salvation of their souls.

Our seasons of specially marked religious interest, have been to a very great extent free from the mere excitement of the natural feelings. Stillness, solemnity, a sense of ingratitude and guilt, and a consciousness of entire dependence on him, who alone can save, have generally characterized the inquiry meeting. Those, who have indulged hopes of pardoning mercy, have not been encouraged to make a hasty profession of religion. It has been the desire of the pastor to follow up such individuals with instructions, cautions and encouragements as their respective cases might seem to require, giving them at the same time an opportunity to test their sincerity and the strength of their hopes by the quieting influence of time, and by an unavoidable exposure to the temptations of the world. While it is of great and indispensable importance that those, who have truly repented and sincerely believed, should, according to a positive divine requirement, confess Christ in an open and solemn manner, it is also very desirable that not any should be encouraged to profess faith in God while they do not afford a reasonable evidence that they are actual possessors of that faith. They, who have a name to live while they are dead, who have a standing in the church when their hearts

are not there, when their most earnest feelings and their most steady efforts go forth after worldly and perishable objects, are eminently in danger of losing their souls. They do not apply to themselves the solemn warnings of the gospel, and they appropriate its promises and its consolations to their own case while the former actually belong to them and the latter have no reference to them. The deception they thus practice on themselves continues, it is to be feared, till probation is past and heaven is lost.

In the second place, it appears from these statistics that there have been two hundred and seventy-two admissions to the church during the present ministry, and that these added to the fifty-four, who were members at the commencement of it, make three hundred and twenty-six, the whole number of members during thirty years. This fact suggests a consideration of solemn interest to all. It is this, that there is a great difference in the character, in the conversation and in the acts of those, who have taken the same solemn covenant, and who sit together at the table of the Lord. Are not some much more constant and faithful in the discharge of Christian duties and in the improvement of Christian privileges than others? Does it not appear very probable that some are absent from the sanctuary, from the communion table even, and from the place of prayer, for reasons which would not keep away others? Is there not a great inequality in the contributions for benevolent objects? Do not some make it a matter of conscience to give for the promotion

of the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom under the variety of forms in which those interests come before them, are they not observant of some regular system in the bestowment of their charities, do they not seek out objects, which they regard it as their duty and their privilege to advance? On the other hand, are there not those, who do not act from any settled principles and from any hearty good will in respect to the whole matter of Christian benevolence? Do they not fail to take pains to help forward enterprises of this sort, which they cannot but be convinced have the approbation of heaven? Do they not at times withhold their hand from giving when their covenant God plainly requires them to bestow their charities? Is he, who sits over against the treasury when his disciples are casting in their contributions, satisfied with what they give? Will it appear when the final reckoning is made and every one shall be rewarded according to his works, that *they did what they could?* Will there be no regrets at this point when he, who gave himself for sinners, shall publish to a waiting universe the gifts they have imparted and the sacrifices they have made for the advancement of his cause and for the salvation of a lost world?

This diversity in feeling and in action existing, it would be perfectly natural that there should be also an essential difference in the progress made in the divine life. The principle of grace when first planted in the human heart is feeble. It may be compared to leaven and to a grain of mustard-seed. It must be cultivated

by the means God has appointed. He will bless those means, if faithfully employed. They, who are chargeable with neglect in regard to them, will not grow in knowledge and in grace. Their attainments will be in proportion to their fidelity. There are those in the Christian church, who began their course in the right way. They have been conscientious and scrupulous in every step of their progress. Their interests pertaining to another life were first to be sought, their duties toward God, the first to be performed. There are those also, who have professedly entered on the Christian life, but at the very outset, they were chargeable with deficiencies and neglects. Their standard was not sufficiently elevated, and of course, their aims would not be so. Thus they have "loitered in their way." Thus they have found less satisfaction in a religious course than they had anticipated, and thus they have made little if any progress for years in the divine life.

During these thirty years, or a portion of them, has there not been something of this sort in our own beloved church? Who doubts but that some, who are *gone*, shone while they were yet with us "as lights in the world," were faithful to their Saviour, faithful in public and private duties? Some brought forth the *mature fruits* of piety. As they approached the final scene, they gained new victories over sin and over the world. Some, that were early called to their blessed home, made rapid advances in the way of holiness. Both these elder and younger persons had hope and peace in their last hours.

The savor of their names is yet sweet among us. "Being dead, they yet speak," "and in example live." On the other hand, have we not reason to fear that some of the professed friends of Christ have given occasion for the rebuking inquiry—"what do ye more than others?" Have they not greatly neglected their duties and sadly misimproved their privileges? Have they not been conformed to this world? Have they not sought its objects with too earnest desires? In this way, has not their communion with the Father and the Son been interrupted? Has not darkness come over their minds and insensibility to eternal things stolen upon their hearts? Have they not failed to manifest the benevolent spirit of the gospel and to live for duty and for that Saviour, who died for them?

Within the past generation a great change has come over us. Perhaps there has scarcely been a period since the age of the apostles when the professors of religion have been met by more powerful temptations. The comparative quiet of former generations has been disturbed. The benevolent movements, which are so various, and which have so generally sprung up of late years, we cannot but regard as great blessings to the church at large. It is in accordance with the divine method that the people of God should be called to action, to sacrifices for the promotion of his kingdom and for the salvation of sinners. Not only his ministers, but his people must be laborers together with him. They are placed in his vineyard, and they must work *there*. An active and de-

voted church can alone be a successful and a useful church. An active and faithful man alone can enjoy true satisfaction in religious things, and bless his generation. All those not truly devoted, not giving of their substance to promote objects heaven approves, cannot be like him, who gave himself for a lost and a guilty race. They who do nothing for Christ, make it manifest that they have done nothing for their own souls. We would, therefore, encourage greater effort, greater activity among the followers of Christ. But we would guard them at the same time against the neglect of the more common and private duties of religion. Amid all the facilities for traveling and for communication with different and distant places, amid political agitations and the outbreakings of selfishness, passion, and cruelty, amid all the excitements in connection with reformatory measures, and even benevolent operations, there are imminent dangers attending the followers of the Lamb. There is danger of their being satisfied with a noisy religion, with a condemnation of others, while there is a neglect of their own hearts, and an oversight of their own deficiencies. They are exposed to catch something of that worldly spirit, and join in that fearful rush for gain, which so remarkably prevail, and which threaten to "drown men in destruction and perdition." A double guard should be set where temptations and perils thicken around us. A greater degree of watchfulness and prayer, a more constant attention to reading the Scriptures, to religious meditation and private devotion should be observed by

those, who have so many unfriendly influences bearing upon them.

We have alluded to our gatherings at the sanctuary. Nearly five years of Sabbaths have been enjoyed during the past generation. How suitable for us as a people to consider how they have been spent by us.

Though during this period many Christians and others have been alarmed in view of the degeneracy of the age, and have put forth unwonted efforts to redeem sacred time from being secularized by labor, and profaned by traveling, visiting, intemperance and gambling; yet there is reason to fear the most perilous consequences from this source. Profanation of the Sabbath and corruption of morals go together. If men would harden their hearts, if they would become insensible to the realities of the unseen world, if they would make sure the endless doom of the wicked, how directly would they effect their purpose by trampling down the Sabbath. It is a spirit most deeply imbued with worldliness and infidelity, that would blot out the light of this sacred day.

Have we, as a people, made any improvement in the observance of the Sabbath for the last thirty years? Are professors of religion more watchful over their conversation and more careful in regard to their conduct? It must be remembered that the wise and merciful intentions of this holy day are perverted, not only by directly and palpably profaning it, but by neglecting the appropriate services and the special duties, which immediately belong to it. One may not labor, he may not seek amusement,

he may not engage in worldly and vain conversation during consecrated time, and yet, he may be chargeable with a profanation of the day God has set apart for himself and for the benefit of man. A want of suitable feelings, absence from the sanctuary for no good reason, neglect of the sacred volume, prove that holy time is not kept. We may review the manner in which the Sabbaths for thirty years, or a less number of years, have been observed, we may often fail to remember where we were, and how we were employed as they passed; but the Lord of the Sabbath has "a book of remembrance written." When that shall be opened, forgotten Sabbaths and misimproved privileges will be brought to light in the presence of assembled worlds! There will be no mistake in those records, and there will be no wrong done to any who shall be judged out of that book. No excuses will be received. None will be given. Every mouth will be stopped. They, who shall have honored the day of sacred rest, who shall have been wise to improve its privileges and to perform its duties, will enter that upper temple—

> "Where congregations ne'er break up
> And Sabbaths have no end."

Those, who shall not have "remembered the Sabbath day to keep it holy," will fail to gain the heavenly rest, and to take part in the joyful and endless praises of the New Jerusalem.

In the third place, your attention is called to the importance of the religious training of children and the education of the young in the ways of piety by the consideration that so many have been dedicated to God in baptism, and so many in the morning of life have professed their faith in Christ.

Every minister of the gospel should take special interest in the youth and children of his charge. The example of Christ in this respect furnishes lessons of instruction How interested was he in behalf of those, who were in the morning of life! How condescending and how faithful was he to the young man, who inquired what he must do to inherit eternal life! How tenderly did he regard little children! How affectionately did he speak of them, and how ready was he to bless them! How touching the prediction of the prophet concerning him;—"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm, carry them in his bosom." His direction to Peter, given under such tender circumstances, was;—"Feed my lambs," take special care of those who are young in years and in Christian experience.

It is suitable for the pastor, for parents, and others, to inquire how they have discharged their duties toward their offspring, toward the children of the covenant, and toward all the young over whom they may have influence? Where is the watchfulness, the decision and the discipline of a former period? Has there not been a sad letting down of parental authority and control? Are

not children left more to themselves, are they not permitted to choose their own ways, to follow the bent of their own inclinations more than they were, even thirty years ago? Is not salutary restraint so much removed that they suffer injuries in the formation of their characters and their habits, which are seldom, if ever, repaired? There was not that violation of the Sabbath, that profanation of the name of God, that disrespect to superiors at the commencement of the present ministry that we so painfully witness now. In no previous period in the history of our country were there so many neglected youth and children, so many of whom better things were fondly hoped, given up to folly, to vice and degradation. Temptations fitted to ensnare the young are all abroad. Wherever they go they meet them. Like whirlpools, they draw in uncounted numbers and send them quick to ruin! Who can adequately speak, or even conceive, of the multitude of blighted parental hopes? Who can tell of the tears shed in secret places over those, who hear not the instruction of a father and regard not the law of a mother? Will not the beloved youth of this people who are to act so important a part during the generation to come, hear the counsel of him, *this day*, who watches for their souls as one that must give account, and who feels a tender interest in their present and their future well-being? Be not carried away with youthful vanities. Consider the precious season of life you are now enjoying. There are "two ways and two ends," which lie before you. You may possess a character

which will fit you for usefulness and happiness on earth, and for unspeakable felicities in a coming world. Give your early affections to him, who so kindly invites your love. Be not deceived by the allurements of earth. Rise above those influences, and separate yourselves from those associations, which tend to draw you away from an honorable and useful position in society. Duly prize the value of character. Let truth alone fall from your lips. Let worthy actions alone be done by your hands. Suitably estimate the worth of a good conscience and an approving God.

I have spoken of the number of this people who have died during thirty years. This I shall make, *in the last place*, the subject of a few remarks. Seldom have we so many in the house of God as have gone during this period to the house appointed for all the living. What changes have taken place while these years have been passing away! The congregation worshiping here in the former temple, and the congregation assembled in this house to-day, how different! One hundred and ninety that were heads of families at my settlement have departed this life, while fifty-seven only remain. There are now two hundred and thirteen heads of families, that were not such thirty years ago. The majority of the present congregation did not compose a part of the worshiping assembly at the commencement of the present ministry. They never saw my venerable predecessor, and they hear only of the fathers and mothers in Israel, who then aided in bearing onward the ark of the Lord.

Several of those who took an active and deep interest in the erection of this comely and substantial house of worship, have taken up their abode in the repository of the dead. Thus "one generation passeth away and another generation cometh." What solemn and salutary lessons are to be learned by us, my beloved hearers, by the review of one generation! The scenes of bereavement, the funeral processions, the parting tears, the agonized hearts, how do they come up afresh and awaken the tenderest recollections of dear departed ones! We love to remember them on a day like this, though our hearts may be filled with sorrow! We would drop a kind tear at the recollection of their virtues, and of what they were to us. "Mourning for the worthy dead," a continued, tender interest in them, "is but a suitable tribute to their living worth."

We dwell on these past painful scenes, and they are certainties to us. The events of the present are also certainties; but we look into the future, and it is all unknown. The times and the seasons are hidden from us. Most affecting changes we are sure will take place; but we know not the time and the circumstances that will attend them. When another generation shall have passed away, what a change in this congregation! These little children, who shall be spared in life, will be among the chief actors in society, and the sustainers of religious institutions. Our youth, that shall survive, will be passing the meridian of life, and the premonitions of coming infirmities and hastening years will attend them.

These men in middle life, so actively engaged, placed under such responsibilities, so important in their families and in society, will either be bending under the weight of years, or mingling their dust with the clods of the valley. The aged men and the aged women—monuments of divine and sparing goodness this day, and yet blessed with the ability to be useful in the church and in the world—will all be gone; not a solitary individual will be left to tell of the past, or to hope for the future. The pastor, who amid all his deficiencies and errors, is permitted still to stand on his watch-tower, will then have finished his work, and have been gathered to his fathers. He will then have met many of his people in another world, and there it will be known how he shall have fulfilled his ministry, and how they shall have improved it!

Oh, the scenes that are so shortly to open to us all! How soon the intervening years will pass and bring them to our view! Are we prepared to meet them? Are you, my respected aged friends, ready for the hastening hour—are you prepared to enter on the rest that remains to the people of God! Of parents and of those who are in the meridian of life, let me affectionately and earnestly inquire if your great work is done? Thirty years will quickly pass, and they will bear your spirits to another world. Oh, arise and seek for durable riches and righteousness. Lay up your treasures where change and death cannot come!

Beloved youth, our hopes and our fears gather around

you. The character, for life and for eternity, is more generally formed in early years. Do just right now in the morning of your days, begin a course that shall end right when probation is past, and bright and glorious prospects for this world and the world to come await you! But if any of you essentially err in youth, the error may never be corrected. It may hinder your respectability and your usefulness on earth, and it may bar the gates of heaven against you.

Neither on this occasion, nor on any other, would I forget the little children. We hope they will be spared long to be blessings to their parents and to the world. Remember, my dear children, the God who made you, and the Saviour who died to redeem you. Our God is a great God, but he is not so great that he will refuse to hear the prayer of the smallest child. Call on his name, and he will bless you and make you his own dear children.

To you, beloved people of my charge, I give my heartfelt thanks for all your kindness and forbearance, for your sympathy in severe illness, and in deep sorrows, and I commend you all to God and to the word of his grace!

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